FLI: A Strategy for Revitalizing Endangered Languages and Cultures

Forum for Language Initiatives

Fakhruddin Akhunzada, Executive Director
Wayne Lunsford, Ph.D., Advisor

Background

Northern Pakistan is home to nearly 30 distinct languages, many of them with a relatively small number of speakers. Due to a lack of institutional support, many of these languages have been under the threat of extinction. The Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI) was established in 2002 with the goal to preserve and promote these languages by building capacity among the people from local communities in the area of language documentation, multilingual education, literature production, and organizational development.

In addition, FLI also publishes books about the languages and cultures of the region, runs advocacy campaigns for the language communities and builds bridges among people in the region. External linguists, anthropologists and specialists, in the areas of multilingual education and management, work as mentors and master trainers. They trained a core group of people from the language groups (LGs) through both long and short-duration training interventions. In spite of many challenges, FLI has made significant progress towards achieving its goals in its first ten years.

The situation as a whole in the country and among these language communities is very different from the way it was back in 2002. Many trainees of FLI are actively involved in preserving and developing their mother tongues. Some have formed community-based organizations and established mother tongue-based education programmes, and one of the provincial governments has passed a bill to establish a government department to develop the languages in the province. FLI's administrative and training responsibilities have also transitioned to Pakistani citizens who have benefited the most from the training, although these external experts continue to provide consultancy and training services to FLI's local leadership.

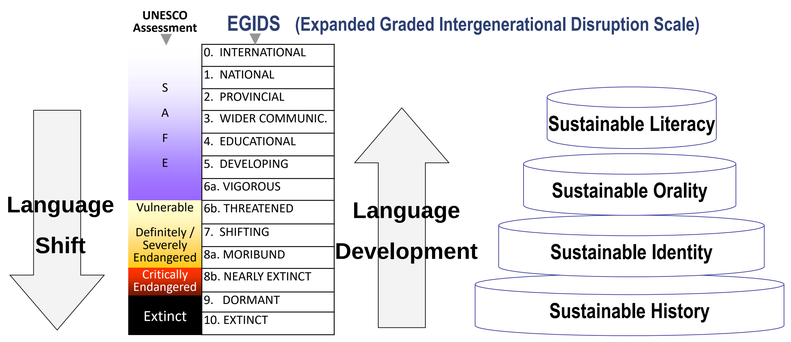
Language Revitalization through MT-based Education

- The approach FLI promotes for MTB-MLE in schools supports and naturally contributes to the success of any language revitalisation programme:

	Yr. 1 (Pre-School)	Yr. 2 (Pre-School)	Yr. 3 (Prim.1)	Yr. 4 (Prim.2)	Yr. 5 (Prim.3)	Yr. 6 (Prim.4)	Yr. 7 (Prim.5)
Language as a Subject	Build oral L1 L1 literacy acquisiton preparedness L1 literacy L2 oral	L1 oral & written L2 oral L2 literacy L3 oral	L1 & L2 oral and written L3 oral L3 literacy	L1, L2, and L3 Oral and Written			L1, L2 & L3 oral & written L4 oral L4 literacy
Medium of Instruction (MOI)	*L1*		*L1 & L2* *L2 academic terms*	*L1, L2, and L3* *L2 & L3 academic terms*			

(Adapted from Mhmd. Zaman and Mhmd. Zubair)

- Language-based development (LD) work is imperative before any plans are made for mother tongue-based literacy and education.
- LG participatory efforts and motivation to move beyond the stage of orality include, as a foundation, an accepted writing system. Abundant literature, to preserve cultural traditions and foster lifelong learning, plus able readers reverse language shift and fuel language development.

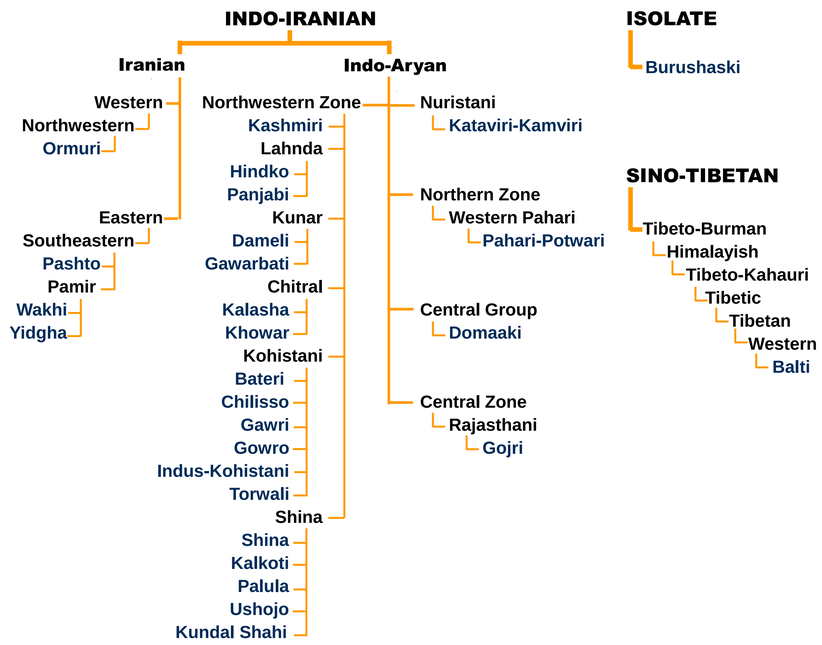


(Adapted from Paul Lewis, Mark Karan, et al)

Core Values of FLI

Transferring knowledge and skills
Developing human resources
Serving through partnerships and networking
Affirming the intrinsic worth of all mother tongues and cultures
Building Local Capacity through Mentoring
A Short Guide for Mentors
Wayne A. Lunsford

Language Relatedness in FLI's Target Region



FLI's Challenges

- CBOs staff, trained by FLI, lack funding to carry out their plans. Some projects cannot be launched and others end prematurely.
- Many charity organizations are doing development and literacy work but the MTB-MLE approach is not widely supported or promoted.
- Importance of mother tongue in education acknowledged by a provincial government but approach adopted is bureaucratic, lacks understanding; involvement of people from the community is not encouraged.
- Lack of financial and moral support from national/provincial government.
- Rise in militancy and "talibanization", especially in the north, put NGOs staff and facilities at risk as sometimes they are targeted.
- Risk of losing highly trained personnel because other companies are able to offer better salaries.
- Language-based development work is not supported or fully understood by academic institutions in the country.
- Promotion of language-based identity could be misunderstood by the government as divisive. So the question before FLI is, "How to promote LD without looking like we are encouraging separatism?"

FLI's Achievements

FLI helped start mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) pilot projects in Gawri, Palula, and Torwali language communities by training people in curriculum and instructional material development, school management, and teacher training. Currently, FLI is engaged with other three language communities (Hindko, Indus Kohistani, and Khowar) to do the same.

Enhanced organizational development skills of personnel from seven language and cultural organizations by training them in finance, project management, and leadership development.

Published a number of books in its academic and vernacular series, "FLI Language and Culture Series" and "*Maqami Zaban-o-Adab ka Ishati Silsila*" (مقامی زبان و ادب کا اشاعتی سلسلہ) respectively.

Translated important language-related materials from English into Urdu which include semantic domains, linguistics key terms, and UNESCO MLE brochures.

Provided a platform for the disadvantages language communities of northern Pakistan through trainings and conferences to collaborate for mutual learning

Provided access to academic resources to Pakistani and non-Pakistani researchers, trainers and consultants **by establishing a library** of linguistics, anthropology, literacy, orthography, lexicography, training and management books and articles and electronic resources.

Advocated for language rights and multilingual education among disadvantaged language communities which now regularly celebrate *International Mother Language Day* (February) and *International Literacy Day* (September).

Trained more than 30 people from a dozen language communities in basic language documentation, dictionary-making, orthography development, and literature production.

Raised awareness among the media and government which has been very effective. Journalists are, in turn, using FLI's information for their views and for writing articles. A provincial government initiated language development work by appointing a Language Authority for the region.

FLI has established international links for knowledge sharing and has good relationship with the Foundation for Endangered Languages (UK), SIL international, Sorosoro (France), LingDay (Japan), Bhasha Research Centre (India), Payap and Mahidol universities (Thailand), RNLD (Australia), and UNESCO (Thailand). FLI is a planning group member of the CTLDC and member of Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education working group.

Poster displayed at:

3rd International Conference on
Language Documentation and Conservation (ICLDC)
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University of Hawai'i, 28 Feb-3 Mar, 2013

Contact Information

Forum for Language Initiatives

P.O. Box 763
Islamabad, Pakistan

Tel: +92 51 235 4551
e-Mail: info@fli-online.org
Web: www.fli-online.org

Training and resource centre working to enable the language communities of northern Pakistan to preserve and promote their mother tongues